

## Come into God's Presence with Singing

*Psalm 100*

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There is such power in music. We all know that music does something to us and in us. Music is so powerful that neuroscientists and psychologists are exploring how music affects the brain. In fact, music is being used in the healing arts in a variety of venues.

And music is like politics and religion. We all have our opinions and our opinions, of course, are always right! Every new generation seems to find a new music that previous generations scoff at. My grandparents tuned in to Lawrence Welk and couldn't understand why The Beatles were so popular. But things have a way of coming full circle: The last couple of times I have watched the Grammys I have felt so... old. "They call *that* music?!"

So whether it is Bach or The Beatles, Mozart or Madonna, beach music or big band, James Brown or Jay Z, music has a way of reaching us in a way few other mediums can. It seems to bypass our defenses and our deductive logic to touch our emotions and our soul.

The Psalmist declares, "Come into God's presence with singing!" That's because singing, music, is a way for us to communicate our love and praise for God. Our worship section of the Presbyterian *Book of Order* says that music is a form of prayer. Often, music is our way of communicating what can hardly be said with words.

So not only in the Psalms, but in the New Testament, the biblical writer connects worship to spiritual songs. Music is a gift from God, and it has been an important part of our devotional life and worship life throughout the history of the church.

You might be surprised that hymns and hymn singing are primarily a product that came out of the Protestant Reformation of the 1500s. Martin Luther, who inspired that reforming movement, was a musician and incorporated the singing of hymns as a part of worship.

In that day it was radical! John Calvin, the chief theologian and architect of the Reformed/Presbyterian wing of faith, recognized the emotional power of music, and for that reason included the singing (rather than the saying) of Psalms in worship.

He said, such singing “lends dignity and grace to sacred actions and has the greatest value in kindling our heart to a true zeal and eagerness to pray.” He said, “Those who love the Lord are encouraged to sing till we feel our hearts ascending with our tongues.”

Calvin cautioned that “we should be very careful that our ears be not more attentive to the melody than our minds to the spiritual meaning of the words.”

So in the early days of Protestantism, a debate raged over hymns. Could a hymn be only the Psalms or only biblical words, put to music? Or could a hymn be composed based on scripture or on a Biblical theme?

Perhaps the biggest breakthrough within Protestant music was the emerging hymn writing of Charles Wesley which convinced a lot of Christians, even Presbyterians, that hymns could be composed that expressed the faith using theological and biblical themes.

What I know is that what you and I believe and learn about God often comes from the hymns we sing.

- “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God”
- “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound”
- “Great Is Thy Faithfulness”
- “There’s a Wideness in God’s Mercy”
- “Joy to The World, the Lord is come”
- “God of Grace and God of Glory”
- “Christ Is Made the Sure Foundation”

On Pentecost, a day when we celebrate God’s spirit breaking into world and establishing the church, we celebrate that the church has been sustained with music – especially when we have been able to sing our faith.

Come into God’s presence with singing!